

Rep.
Jeff
Gombosky



1997



Legislative Report

3rd Legislative District

Keeping in Touch

I value the ideas and comments of citizens in the Third District, and it is especially important for Spokane residents to stand up and be heard on important issues. Since there's quite a distance between Olympia and Spokane, it is crucial for you to send written testimony and comments on legislation, as few Spokane residents can attend House committee hearings. You also might want to share your comments with other Third District lawmakers, Sen. Lisa Brown and Rep. Alex Wood.

And if you need help with a state agency, please contact my aide, Guy Bergstrom, who'll be happy to help. Guy and Sen. Brown's aide, Ruthie Zimmer, are both from Spokane and will be happy to provide you with information about legislation or help guide you through problems with state government. In addition, myself, Sen. Brown and Rep. Wood will establish a joint office in Spokane while the Legislature is adjourned. We'll send citizens information about how to reach us in Spokane once that office is up and running. For now, here's how to keep in touch:

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Dear Neighbors,

It's been my pleasure to serve as your advocate in the state Legislature this session, a hectic time for myself and my wife, Melissa, but a rewarding chance to work on behalf of the Spokane community.

My priorities for the 1997 session were: (1) To stay in contact with the people of Spokane; (2) To work hard on both the Appropriations and Children and Family Services Committees; and (3) To support proposals consistent with the values and interests of Spokane's middle-class families.

Unfortunately, most of the proposals considered this year were to the benefit of special interest groups, with little to provide opportunities or support for working families and support the Spokane community. I stand behind Gov. Gary Locke's vetoes of many of these special interest bills, including legislation to make health care less affordable and harder to obtain.

The good news is that citizens should be pleased with how Democrats, Republicans and Gov. Locke worked together to enact sweeping reforms to the state's juvenile justice and welfare systems. While these reforms won't be entirely painless and have some flaws, they are a step in the right direction toward making our streets safer and form policy that is consistent with our shared values of hard work and fairness.

Again, it is a privilege to serve you.

Sincerely,



JEFF GOMBOSKY

Special Interests vs. Community Interests

- No action on campaign finance reform
- Attempts to eliminate worker safety protections
- Increased burdens on consumers for health coverage

Our form of government was designed to let the people have the first and final word on what policies are in the state's best interest. However, many people today feel that government spends more time listening to wealthy special interests at the expense of working families. Too often during the 1997 legislative session this was true, as special interests won out over working people.

The Legislature could have reduced the ability of lobbyists and special interests to influence elections by passing campaign finance reforms. But a number of good reform proposals didn't even receive a public hearing, including measures to:

- Unmask the identity of special interest groups
- Increase oversight of Political Action Committees (PACs)
- Establish a citizen commission to recommend changes to our campaign financing system.
- Increasing penalties for those who break campaign-finance and disclosure laws
- Limit last-minute, big-money political contributions

Harper's Magazine reported recently that 48 percent of Americans believe they have a better chance of sighting Elvis than ever witnessing meaningful campaign finance reform. This legislative session clearly demonstrated why. But while the Legislature didn't bother to take big money out of politics, rich special interests did try to sneak through bills that run contrary to the good of all citizens. The Legislature nearly passed a bill to deny compensation to workers who were knowingly injured by their employers. The proposal would have overturned a unanimous state Supreme Court decision that held workers are entitled to compensation if they are intentionally harmed by their employer on the job.

The Legislature did pass a bill that would make it harder for working families to afford private health

insurance. Thankfully, Gov. Locke vetoed that bill. But the larger question remains: Who is the Legislature listening to? My hope is that next year, we can work on proposals that strengthen and enhance our communities and make it easier for middle-class families to make a living, pay the bills and take care of their families.

Safer Streets: Reforming the Juvenile Justice System

Democrats and Republicans worked together to craft sweeping juvenile justice reforms with House Bill 3900, which gives local police and courts new tools for dealing with juveniles who commit violent crimes. Although overall crime is on the decline both locally and nationally, great numbers of teenagers are committing violent crimes, and many repeat teen offenders believe the juvenile justice system will let them off easy. HB 3900 was passed by the Legislature unanimously and includes:

- "Commit an adult crime, do adult time." Older juveniles (16- and 17-year-olds) who commit violent crimes, such as rape and murder, will more often be treated like adults rather than automatically being sent to the juvenile justice system. In addition, the law includes increased punishment for any violent crime committed with a firearm.
- More funding for drug abuse treatment — Juvenile court judges estimate that 75 percent of teen offenders suffer from drug or alcohol abuse.
- Increased community involvement — Community based programs will emphasize to our youth that they are responsible for their actions, and a pilot program will explore the effectiveness of volunteer mentors for teens.

Fair Wages: Working Families Deserve a Raise

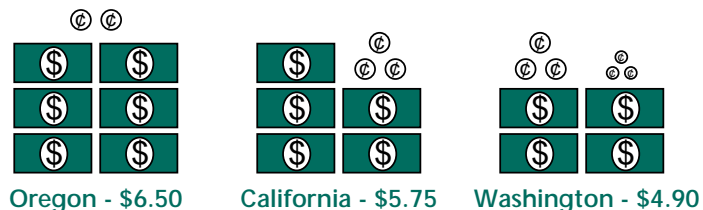
It's time that every working parent earns a fair wage, enough to feed their family, and that every parent who works 40 hours a week can afford health care for their children and themselves. There's a simple and fair way to make work pay, and to make raising a family easier. That's why I wrote and introduced House Bill 2200, which would:

- Raise the minimum wage to a livable wage, \$6.50 by the year 2000.
- Reward employers who provide health insurance by allowing a wage of \$6 an hour for businesses providing health coverage equivalent to the state's Basic Health Plan.

Our state now has the lowest minimum wage on the West Coast, as Oregon is raising the minimum wage to \$6.50 and California boosting it to \$5.75.

Washington's minimum wage is \$4.90 an hour —

West Coast Minimum Wage



before taxes, that's \$196 a week, \$784 a month.

For too long, working people have gone without a raise while corporate CEO's got fat increases in their paychecks. Today, CEO's make 212 times the average worker's pay. In 1995, the average pay for CEO's was up 30 percent, to \$3.7 million. Meanwhile, real wages for working families and the middle class have been declining, and for all the talk of tax cuts, the tax burden on working families and the middle class has actually gone up while the rich pay less than ever before.

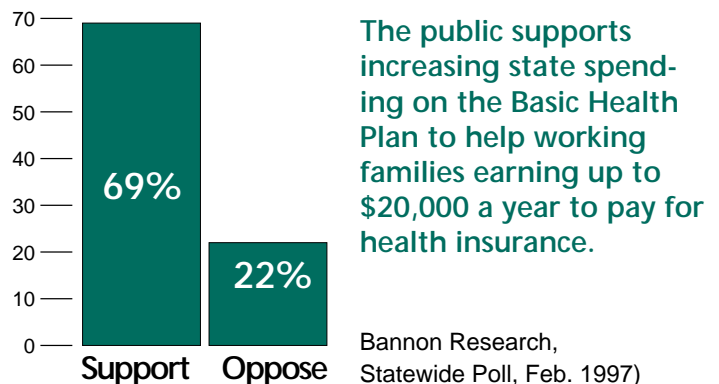
Spokane's citizens are hit especially hard by the trend toward lower wages for workers and ever-higher pay for the elite — the median wage for 45 percent of Spokane County citizens is under \$14,000 a year. Opponents of raising the minimum wage claim that when working people get pay raises, it causes inflation and threatens the economy; but when a CEO gets a far larger raise, it's a victory for free enterprise. The Republican majority refused to consider House Bill 2200 but I will continue fighting for fairer wages for Spokane's working families.

Basic Health Plan: Coverage for working families

The Basic Health Plan (BHP) is a crucial support for Spokane's working families. More than 600,000 people in our state — 38,000 in Spokane County alone — don't have health coverage.

The Basic Health Plan is crucial for working families who have no other way of getting health coverage. The plan is affordable since individuals are charged on a sliding scale based on income.

While the BHP has been a success, there are still more than 70,000 people on the waiting list to participate. That list grows by 5,000 each week statewide, and in Spokane County alone, more than 6,000 families are still waiting for health coverage because of lack of funding.



Expanding the Basic Health Plan to give more families access to affordable health care is the right thing to do from every standpoint — for children, for the state budget and for the sake of the working poor. The BHP saves taxpayer money since preventive care is a lot less expensive than emergency rooms, which is the only way a lot of people can get treatment right now.

That's why I heartily supported Gov. Locke's efforts to expand the Basic Health Plan so that more working families can get the health care they need.

Education: The Surest Ticket to the American Dream

A well-educated workforce is the key to a strong local economy — Boeing and Microsoft don't hire just anybody out of high school. It makes sense to invest in education:

- \$1 invested in higher education returns \$9 to \$10 to the economy.
- Education is the best poverty fighter: 46 percent of state residents without any diploma or degree lived in poverty in 1989-90, while just 7 percent of those with a bachelor's degree were in poverty.
- Businesses are attracted to locations with a large pool of highly educated workers.

This session, the Legislature began to tackle the coming crunch at our public colleges and universities by providing an additional 6,390 enrollments. And, lawmakers approved a pre-paid tuition plan to allow families to save now for the children's college education. However, funding to continue education reform and programs to retrain dislocated workers were both reduced. We must continue to make our public

schools and universities stronger, and to create space on our campuses so that every citizen who wants to study hard has a chance to earn a college degree, the surest ticket to the American Dream.



Micah McCabe, a 9th grader at Northwest Christian School in Spokane, served as a legislative page for Rep. Gombosky during the 1997 session.